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HOUSE PANEL 'FERRETED OUT' ON NICARAGUA RAID, MEMBER SAYS  
BY ROBERT PARRY  
WASHINGTON

Key members of the House Intelligence Committee had to ferret out the facts about the CIA's direct supervision of a commando raid against the key Nicaraguan port of Corinto, a congressman on the panel says.

Rep. Norman Y. Mineta, D-Calif., said the CIA initially told the committee that the devastating Oct. 10 raid was conducted by a Nicaraguan rebel group, but under persistent questioning, conceded two days after the attack that agency officers directed it from a ship at least 12 miles offshore in international waters.

"The committee found out about the raid only after it had taken place and because (members) were persistent in ferreting out the information," Mineta said in an interview. "We should not be forced to cajole, harass and dig to find out what acts of war our government is committing."

Mineta said the discovery of the direct CIA role at Corinto sparked the committee's unsuccessful attempt last fall to cut off all money for the program.

The Senate Intelligence Committee apparently did not find out about the CIA's role in the raid until April 2, when the panel also was told of the agency's direction of the mining of Nicaragua's harbors, according to committee sources. The mining began in January.

Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., a panel member, said the committee paid little attention to developments in Nicaragua from September to March, the period when the CIA became directly involved in the war against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

Durenberger said the Senate committee deserves part of the blame for the recent furor over whether the CIA had kept Congress adequately informed about the mining. "In part, it's our fault for not staying well informed," he said.

Durenberger also said the failure of CIA-backed Nicaraguan "contras" or counter-revolutionaries to make major military gains prompted the spy agency to take a more direct role in trying to pressure the Sandinistas, who President Reagan claims supply leftist guerrillas in El Salvador.

CIA officials "realized the contras and their ralliers were only going to be able to do so much. They weren't going to be able to accomplish much in the north or south" of Nicaragua, Durenberger said in an interview.

"You had to move it up to some higher level with some specialized activity that would put economic pressure" on the Sandinistas, he said.

Mineta said Reps. Edward P. Boland, D-Mass., the chairman, and Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., pressed the effort to obtain the facts about the Corinto raid, in which commandos opened fire from speedboats, touching off a major oil fire that forced the town's evacuation.

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